

TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT
BOARD OF SELECTMEN
Minutes of February 10, 2015

- I. **ROLL CALL.** Select Board Chair John Quinn III, Selectmen Kevin T. Beal, Brad Denny, Dennis Donahue, Lynn Doney (absent), Matthew Gadbois, Kenneth W. Goslant, K. David Maxwell, and James R. Wilson. Also present were Town Manager Jeffrey Schulz, Acting Clerk Kenneth McCann, Finance Director Laurie Baroffio, Zoning Administrator Michele Braun, Fred Duplessis, CPA (Sullivan Powers & Co.), Robert Cruickshank (Lost Nation ATV Club), Richard Amore (Vermont Agency of Commerce & Community Development), Patricia Coppolino (Vermont Agency of Natural Resources), Christine Barnes (Conservation Commission), Gretchen Dunn (GO! Northfield), Darlene Goodrich (Margaret Holland Inn), Michael Curtis (Margaret Holland Inn), Cara Gauthier (Northfield Rotary Club), Ben Gauthier, Gerard LaVarnway, and Kathleen Lott (*Northfield News*).

Chair Quinn called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m.

- II. **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE.** The Board members and the public were asked to rise and recite the Pledge of Allegiance.

- III. **SET/ADJUST AGENDA.** Manager Schulz noted that Road Foreman Ray Hudson was scheduled to address the Select Board tonight but is too ill to be here.

IV. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED):**

- a. **Fred Duplessis, CPA, Sullivan Powers & Co.: FY 2013/2014 Financial Audit Reports.** Mr. Duplessis was present to provide a brief overview of the audit that his firm performed on the financial statements that the Town and Village of Northfield provided for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2014. He noted that since the Town and Village merged the following day, this will be the final financial audit of the Village of Northfield as a separate entity.

Mr. Duplessis began with the Village's financial statements, noting that they were in full conformity with generally accepted accounting principles (also known as a "clean opinion"). He stated that the Village General fund ended the fiscal year with a positive unbudgeted balance of about \$8000. In addition, the Village Highway fund saw more revenue than anticipated because of the influx of FEMA reimbursement funds. Mr. Duplessis added that the Village's enterprise funds (electric, water, and sewer) also performed well.

Mr. Duplessis then turned to the Town's financial statements, stating that they also received a "clean opinion." He did suggest that the Town should look into creating a larger positive fund balance at the end of the fiscal year so that current expenses could be funded prior to the receipt of property tax payments. Finance Director Laurie Baroffio stated that the post-merger transfer of surplus Village funds to the Town had been anticipated so there had been no need to budget additional "rainy day" funds at the end of this fiscal year. However, most of the surplus is restricted to Highway operations. There was a discussion about the possibility of increasing the surplus for general operations.

Mr. Duplessis stated that Town General revenues had been lower than anticipated, which was partly due to sales of foreclosed properties not bringing in as much funds as had been expected. However, since spending also was less than had been budgeted, this did not cause any problems. The Town Highway fund did see more revenue than expected because of FEMA reimbursement funds. In addition, the Town was required to have a "Single Audit." This also resulted in a "clean opinion" with no problems.

Selectman Beal noted that this was the first time that the Northfield Municipality had employed Sullivan Powers & Co. to conduct a financial audit after working with another accounting firm for several years. He asked how the experience was for Mr. Duplessis and his colleagues. Mr. Duplessis said that Ms. Baroffio and her department had been well prepared for the audit and the process went very well. He added that either he or his colleagues would be happy to answer any questions that the Select Board members might have in coming weeks. Chair Quinn then thanked Mr. Duplessis for his report and for his valuable service to the municipality.

- b. **Robert Cruickshank, Lost Nation ATV Club: DRAFT Ordinance Regulating All-Terrain Vehicle (ATV) Use on Town Highways.** Mr. Cruickshank noted that for the past couple of years, the Town of Northfield had approved a temporary resolution allowing for the use of ATVs on selected Town Highways in order to connect gaps in the off-road trail system on private properties. He would like the Town now to adopt a formal ordinance that would allow for consistent enforcement of trail rules. Mr. Cruickshank had provided the Select Board with a DRAFT ordinance that he and the other Lost Nation ATV Club members would like adopted before the ATV season begins this spring. The Town Highways specified in the ordinance are sections of Bull Run Road, Winch Hill Road, Messier Hill Road, and Lovers Lane. ATV usage of the first three roads had been permitted in last year's resolution and Lovers Lane had been added due to a new connector on the off-road trail system. The ordinance also specifies the hours when ATVs can be operated, requires adherence to posted speed limits, etc.

Chair Quinn asked Manager Schulz if he had any concerns regarding the DRAFT ordinance. Manager Schulz had questions regarding the provision under the "Enforcement" section that granted Lost Nation ATV Club the authority to designate enforcement officers. Mr. Cruickshank stated that they plan to use the Washington County Sheriff's Department in reporting suspected offenses on the trail system. Manager Schulz stated that in that case, other than some minor reformatting, he had no problems with the ordinance text.

Selectman Denny asked if the Northfield Police Department (NPD) would be in any way involved in ordinance enforcement. Mr. Cruickshank stated that this would only happen should NPD officers personally witness a violation during their normal duties. There is no expectation that NPD officers would patrol the trail system. The normal practice is that Lost Nation ATV Club members contact the Sheriff's department once they become aware of possible violations.

Motion by Selectman Wilson, seconded by Selectman Goslant, to accept the ordinance pending minor revisions by Manager Schulz. **Motion passed 8-0-0.** The ordinance will be prepared for formal adoption at the next regular meeting (02/24/15). The public then will have forty-five (45) days to submit a petition requesting reconsideration.

- c. **Richard Amore, Vermont Agency of Commerce & Community Development: Final Northfield V-DAT (Vermont Downtown Action Team) Report.** Mr. Amore noted that the V-DAT team visited Northfield in April 2014, bringing experts on marketing, architecture, etc. to interact with local officials, business owners, and other community leaders over a three-day period. The initial report suggested a number of initiatives that could be adopted in order to expand existing businesses and to encourage the establishment of new ones.

During the visit, a survey was conducted that determined that of downtown business patrons, sixty-two percent (62%) were Northfield residents, nineteen percent (19%) were Norwich University students, and the remainder were mostly from neighboring communities (i.e., Roxbury, West Berlin, etc.). Some of these results were surprising, especially the amount spent off-campus by Norwich University students. The study also looked at "retail leakage," which is the amount spent by Northfield residents for goods and services in other communities. It is estimated that Northfield residents annually spend \$14,100,000 dining out in other towns and \$8,300,000 shopping in non-Northfield grocery stores. These are the main sources of retail leakage that reasonably can be addressed here since there are limited local purchasing opportunities for clothing, appliances, etc.

The V-DAT report also encouraged aesthetic community enhancements such as new gateway signs leading to the community and to the downtown area, installing stylized directional signs that guide visitors to local places of interest, etc. In addition, V-DAT provided branding and marketing advice to local merchants, such as new and consistent signage based upon suggested themes, improved levels of ADA compliance, etc. V-DAT also gave suggestions on how the area on which the FEMA buyout properties were located can be converted into a neighborhood park. Mr. Amore then noted some of the positive actions that have taken place in Northfield since V-DAT's visit, such as the completion of the Depot Square rehabilitation project, continued involvement of local community development groups (i.e., GO! Northfield, the Northfield Rotary Club, etc.), new signage already installed by Depot Square merchants, etc.

The V-DAT report highlighted some of Northfield's existing assets and how these might be exploited to improve the community. These include a vibrant downtown; new and expanding local businesses (i.e., Paine Mountain Brewery, Cabot Hosiery, etc.); the strong relationship between Norwich University and the greater community; ample year-round recreational amenities; affordable housing; etc. Mr. Amore noted that as Norwich University expands its on-campus housing and requires more students to live in the dormitories, this will open up more affordable housing in the downtown area. He added that it is a positive sign for the community that Norwich University is investing so much of its capital into campus enhancements.

Patricia Coppelino from the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources then provided information on the availability of state funds to revitalize suspected Brownfield sites and to market them to new businesses. The next local meeting will be held in March 2015 (exact date TBD) and there will be a discussion of hiring a consultant to identify possible sites for treatment and redevelopment. She would like to keep moving on this in order to maintain the momentum generated from the local V-DAT experience, etc. Selectman Gadbois was grateful for the information presented tonight. Mr. Amore stated that he was available for any questions. Like Ms. Coppelino, he would like to keep the process of community development and economic growth moving forward in coming months.

V. DEPARTMENT HEAD REPORTS

- a. **Zoning Administrator Michele Braun.** Ms. Braun wanted to provide an update on the Water Street FEMA Buyout Project, which had been touched on during Mr. Amore's presentation. She stated that of the thirteen (13) properties that had been originally targeted for FEMA buyout, twelve (12) had been purchased by the municipality and the structures razed. The last property owner has decided to retain her property. If this remains the case, the contiguous area available for a possible riverside park would be reduced from approximately 4.5 acres to 3.2 acres. The property owner has a shrinking window to change her mind as the available FEMA funding will disappear soon. If the community wants to move forward on this, there is the opportunity to create a "natural playground" on the site with walking paths, picnic areas, etc. The first step is to contact the neighbors to see what they would or would not like on the site. Ms. Braun stated that the Town already has about \$40,000 on hand to help turn the design plans into construction plans. Mr. Amore stated that state funds for this purpose are nearly depleted so the Town needs to get moving on this to take advantage of this unusual opportunity. Ms. Braun wanted to know if the Select Board had any initial constraints on what should or should not be done to this area. Selectman Goslant suggested that if a display of the alternatives was available at next month's Town Meeting, some initial public feedback could be obtained at that time. Selectman Beal stated that he likes the green space concept shown in the V-DAT report, including a community garden, etc. Some of the Select Board members had some concerns about whether off-street parking areas could be installed and whether the neighbors might object to this. Mr. Amore thought that any parking questions could be worked out during the project design phase. Ms. Braun noted that Water Street is rather wide so relying on street parking is feasible. Chair Quinn thanked Ms. Braun for the update.

VI. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- a. **January 27, 2015 (Regular Meeting).** Motion by Selectman Beal, seconded by Selectman Wilson, to approve the minutes. There will be one correction: Selectman Gadbois was marked as voting against a motion when he actually voted in favor. The minutes will be corrected to reflect this. **Motion to approve amended minutes passed 7-0-1, with Selectman Donahue abstaining.**

VII. APPROVAL OF BILLS

- a. **Warrant #16-15.** Motion by Selectman Donahue, seconded by Selectman Denny, to approve Warrant #16-15 in the amount of \$372,019.70. Selectman Gadbois asked why there was a \$4115 charge to install radios that had been purchased with Homeland Security grant funds. Ms. Baroffio stated that the grant amount covered the purchase amount but not installation charges. Manager Schulz said that in future, all grant applications will need to go through him in order to prevent such unexpected expenditures associated with grant awards. **Motion passed 8-0-0.**

- b. **Approval of Bi-Weekly Payroll through February 1, 2015.** Motion by Selectman Donahue, seconded by Selectman Wilson, to approve the bi-weekly payroll in the amount of \$85,965.30. **Motion passed 8-0-0.**

VIII. LIQUOR CONTROL COMMISSION

a. Liquor License Renewal Application

- 1. **Champlain Farms.** Motion by Selectman Maxwell, seconded by Selectman Donahue, to approve the liquor license renewal. **Motion passed 8-0-0.**

IX. SELECT BOARD

- a. **Electric Utility Bill Abatement.** Manager Schulz asked that any action on this matter be tabled as the Electric Utility Board still is conducting its review of it.
- b. **Public Hearing (Australian Ballot Articles).** This public hearing will be held on Tuesday, February 24, 2015, at 7:00 p.m. in the Community Room so that members of the public can provide their views on the articles to be voted on by Australian Ballot at this year's Annual Town Meeting (03/05/15). The non-profit organizations that have funding articles on the ballot have been contacted by postcard in case they would like to send a representative (or representatives) to explain their purpose, how the public funds are to be used, etc.

X. BOARD MEMBERS' COMMENTS, CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

- a. **Winter Sand Purchase.** Selectman Goslant asked if additional sand had been purchased recently and delivered to the pit. Manager Schulz confirmed that more had been purchased but did not have the exact figure. He added that the purchase was made to ensure that the Town Highway Department did not run out of it when needed. Since this material will not spoil, what isn't used this winter can be used at a later time. Selectman Goslant is concerned that this bad winter will result in the Town going seriously over budget on this item.
- b. **Sidewalk Maintenance.** Selectman Goslant has heard a number of comments from the public regarding the new sidewalk machine. He wanted to remind people that the reason for its purchase was to have a more reliable machine on hand than the old one, which was subject to frequent breakdowns. There was no expectation that the sidewalks would be in dramatically better condition this winter because of the new machine. Selectman Gadbois was in Montpelier recently and stated that the sidewalks there are about the same as here. Selectman Goslant added that the machine has a lot of sidewalk to clear. Selectman Donahue estimated that Northfield has about seven (7) miles of sidewalk so it takes time to clear all of them.
- c. **Capital West Dispatch.** It was noted that Northfield's dispatching costs recently have gone up significantly and additional increases are expected soon. Manager Schulz stated that representatives from the Central Vermont communities affected by this increase met recently to discuss possible causes and what action (if any) can be taken in response. Chair Quinn was under the impression that higher staffing costs were the primary reason. Manager Schulz agreed and added that more such meetings will be held periodically to keep track of this.

XI. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT. Manager Schulz had nothing to add to his written report.

XII. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (UNSCHEDULED). There was none.

XIII. ADJOURNMENT. Motion by Selectman Donahue, seconded by Selectman Beal, to adjourn. **Motion passed 8-0-0.**

The meeting adjourned at 8:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kenneth L. McCann

Kenneth L. McCann, Acting Clerk

An audio recording of this meeting is available in the Town Manager's Office.

These minutes were approved at the regular Select Board meeting of February 24, 2015.